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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 PM-03 PRS-01 SP-02 USC-05
OMB-01 SAJ-01 SAM-01 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 /040 W
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FM USLO PEKING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6508
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
CINCPAC FOR POLAD

AFR/UN
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~~C O N F I D E N T I A L~~ PEKING 2012

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT CH
SUBJECT: THE CASE OF THE CRYSTAL CASKET

REF: HONG KONG 11613, PEKING 1904

1. THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP'S PERPLEXING SILENCE ON THE QUESTION OF FINAL DISPOSITION OF CHAIRMAN MAO'S REMAINS HAS SPAWNED INCREASING--AND EVER MORE INCENTIVE--- SPECULATION WITHIN PEKING'S FOREIGN COMMUNITY. ORDINARY CHINESE MUST BE EQUALLY PUZZLED BY THIS SILENCE.

2. AN INDIAN DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUE (PROTECT) TELLS US THAT DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF WU HSIU-CHUAN CONFIDED A FEW DAYS AGO TO THE YUGOSLAVS THAT HANDLING OF MAO'S REMAINS HAD BECOME "AN IMPORTANT PROBLEM FOR US." WU DID NOT ELABORATE.

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3. THE SOVIETS AND THEIR ALLIES HAVE SPREAD, WITH A CERTAIN GHOULISH SATISFACTION, THE TALE THAT THE CHINESE BOTCHED THE EMBALMING JOB. IT SEEMS THAT "SEVERAL MONTHS AGO" THE CHINESE APPROACHED THE VIETNAMESE FOR INFORMATION ON THE EMBALMING PROCESS USED TO PRESERVE HO CHI MINH. THE VIETNAMESE THEN ASKED THE SOVIETS, WHO HAD PROVIDED THE TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN THE PERSON OF THREE PHYSICIAN/EMBALMERS IF THE INFORMATION MIGHT BE PASSED TO THE CHINESE. THE SOVIETS DENIED THE REQUEST, MAINTAINING THAT THE CHINESE SHOULD COME DIRECTLY TO THEM. REFUSING TO DO THIS, THE CHINESE SELF-RELIANTLY EMBALMED MAO. BUT WHEN THEY PERMITTED THE MASSES TO FILE BY THE OPEN CASKET, THEY INADVERTENTLY EXPOSED THE REMAINS TO BACTERIA AND AN EMBARRASSING DECOMPOSITION OCCURRED.

4. YET ANOTHER "EXPLANATION" OF THE CASE OF THE CRYSTAL CASKET COMES TO US VIA JAPANESE DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES (PROTECT). THE CHINESE FACTORY ASSIGNED TO PRODUCE THE ETERNAL RESTING PLACE FOR MAO, A CRYSTAL CASKET, FIRST PRESENTED THE CASKET IT HAD MADE FOR CHOU EN-LAI. BUT IT WAS TOO SHORT. A SECOND TRY RESULTED IN A CASKET HAVING THE PROPER DIMENSIONS; BUT THIS TIME THE CRYSTAL WAS TOO "SMOKY" AND WOULD HAVE OBSCURED THE CHAIRMAN'S VISAGE WITHIN. NOW THE FACTORY IS SUPPOSEDLY MAKING A THIRD CASKET.

5. COMMENT: WHILE SEEMINGLY FRIVOLOUS IN A MACABRE WAY, SUCH STORIES DO HAVE A SERIOUS SIDE: THEY, AND THE OFFICIAL SILENCE WHICH SPAWNS THEM, POINT TO LEADERSHIP INDECISIVENESS OR INABILITY TO ACT IN A HIGHLY VISIBLE, EMOTIONAL, AND POLITICALLY SENSITIVE AREA. THIS INTERPRETATION WILL BE MADE AS READILY BY CHINESE AS BY IMAGINATIVE FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND DIPLOMATS, AND PROLONGED FAILURE TO HAND DOWN ANY DEFINITIVE WORD ON DISPOSITION OF THE REMAINS CAN ONLY ERODE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE NEW LEADERSHIP.
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